

The Marine Who Didn't Land
by Cpl. Harold Weisberg

"Say, bud, can you do it in the street?" I called to the shadowy figure leaning against the back of my car.

It was raining pretty hard. I was waiting for my date when I had felt something bump against the car. I'd turned to see a man leaning against the car in the customary position of those getting the too much they have had.

I ran down the window on his side and said, as he straightened out, "If you don't mind, please do it in the street."

He came to the opened window, and I saw he was in uniform, saturated and dripping.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, surprisingly clearly. "It was nice of you to call me. But I'm not sick."

"That's okay, soldier," I replied. "Go ahead and bring it up. Aim for the gutter, but its okay if you hit the car."

"You don't understand," he pleaded, swaying against and from the door. "I'm not sick - well, not the way you think, anyway." He brushed his cap back on his head. "I am sick," he sobbed, his large frame quivering, "But my sickness is mental."

A crying jag, I thought, and suggested, "Why not drop in the drug store on the corner and see if they can fix you up."

Immediately he smashed his fist down on the top edge of the door. It must have hurt, but he didn't flinch.

"They have no medicine for me," he muttered, his tears almost choking him.

I suddenly felt he was, as he said, sick in heart and mind.

"Why don't you come in the car out of the rain, soldier?" I asked. He shook his head, a shower falling inside the car. I tried a new tack and proposed he come home with me and sleep it off.

"You are really kind to me," he replied, softly. "But I don't want to go home."

"I'm a MARINE!" he shouted again. Then he burst into tears anew, raised his reddened face to look me in the eyes and through the tears streaming down his face he sobbed, "And what a hell of a marine I am!"

These were not the tears of a drunken emotion, and I began to worry. Marines just don't go bawling through the streets of Washington. He must have detected my fear, for he assured me "You can't do anything for me. There is no medicine for me." There was a solidness of conviction in his voice. He sounded completely rational.

By this time I was really perplexed. He was a queer guy, and a big one, well over six feet. He had a quiet and expressive way of speaking, and there was that strength about him that convinced me he was a good marine, too. Obviously well educated, I thought. I looked up at him again.

"You'll have to excuse me," he apologized, "but now that I've started I've just got to talk to someone. I hope I'm not imposing on you" - I just shook my head - "Thanks. I've just got to talk. I'm tortured. I can't find peace of mind. I'm from Montana. Gosh, I love this country and I'm in it by choice. I've been all over the world, and I came back because to me (he thumped the hell out of his chest) it's a great country, my country. And I want to do something for it. I love it."

He wouldn't let me interrupt him. I wanted to tell him he showed his love by being a marine. I knew marines were all volunteers.

"Look at me," he went on, standing back a few steps so I could get a better view of his powerful frame. "Look at me", and he swept his great arms out, then flexed his biceps and shook himself.

"Look at me!" he commanded, his voice rising in anger.

"I'm a schoolmarm, that's what," he declared, with snarling contempt, and tremendous sobs racked his body. He laid his head on the door and wept like a hysterical girl.

I felt ineffectual, almost foolish, as I patted him reassuringly on his

broad back. He looked up again, still crying frightfully. It scared me to see such a big, strong man crying and shaking so with his tears.

"Six years," he said, pointing to his stripes, "six years in the service, and now I'm a teacher! Why did they have to do this to me?"

I tried to tell him that teachers were important today, that green men had to be schooled by experienced men, but he would have none of it. So I again asked him to come with me and get some sleep.

"No, I'll be okay by morning," he said. "Do you know what I'll do at eight o'clock? I walk to the front of the room and tell those kids about volts, and amperes, and resistances. I'll tell them about telephone lines, how they will lose all but 85 percent in the first mile, 67 and a half percent in the next mile" - his voice got flat and expressionless, and trailed off into sobs and incoherence.

Suddenly he smashed his fists against the side of the door. It shook the whole car. Never had I seen such a powerful rage. I was by now afraid. His eyes burned into me.

"Six years all over the Pacific," he declared, emphasizing each word, "doing every God-damned thing there is for a marine to do. I know the Pacific, China, all the islands. I know the fleet. Jesus, I know a lot. You know, I didn't have to do this; I wanted to," he said, more quietly, as he fondly fingered his service stripes. "And what the hell did they do to me. Just listen to this!

"They gave me orders, all official and neat, assigning me to teach school. Do you see a buddy at my side?" he demanded, suddenly whirling to his left. "A marine's gotta have a buddy. Do you see mine? No, because he's not with me."

"They gave me my orders. I got it bright and early in the morning. It was December 7th. Yes, 1941.

"I was in Hawaii," he whispered, and his frame throbbed with another burst of tears. "In Pearl Harbor, and they sent me here."

Stupidly I tried to explain that it was necessary and good assignment, and

that probably some day soon he'd get a commission. But that enraged him. He tossed his head back, cracking it hard against the top of the window frame, dumping his cap into my lap. I thought he was going to take a poke at me.

But his fury was not directed against me. Pounding the car to emphasise every phrase he said, sternly, "I want my buddy at my side. That's what marines want. And he's not here. He can't be here, and as long as I'm here I can't have a buddy."

With a sudden burst of passion he swung and pointed to the West.

"He's there!" he exclaimed, "and if I were a good buddy I'd be there with him, in the Solomons, the Marshalls, at Guam or in the Philippines. They got 19 of my company at Guadalcanal and 28 on Guam - one may have been my buddy - and I feel we'd have gotten more of them if I had been there. God! how I ~~hate them~~ want to kill them! And I'm kept here. Everybody goes except me."

He reached in and grabbed me, shaking me, hurting me. He had tremendous strength.

"Can you understand?"

I shook my head. I did understand.

"You've got to understand! We have to put an end to those bastards and their leusy fascism. Understand?"

Just then Lil came down, and she came up to the car.

"I just want to do my part," he continued, "my duty, and they won't let me."

Then he saw Lil, and opened the door for her. "I just want to do my bit," he repeated.

I invited him along, but he said no, and strode off.

"What's wrong with him?", Lil asked me.

"Nothing," I said, a lump in my throat. "Nothing."



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~~Even greater sobbs shook him, and I could hardly understand him.~~

"They won't let me go. God Almighty they won't let me go. I ask them every day, and they keep me here. *Three years.*"

~~He started to walk away, but came back.~~

"I'm a pretty good shot, and I learned a lot in those six years. I want to be there. I want to kill those lousy bastards."

He looked at me, appealingly, and his face was so drawn in anguish I thought I'd begin to cry with him.

~~"Can you understand?" he begged, "can you understand how I feel?"~~ ^{*19 on Guam*} They got 28 of my company at Guadalcanal, ~~one way~~ have been my buddy - and I feel we'd have gotten more of them if I had been there. God how I hate them! God how I want to kill them! And they keep me here!"

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their lousy facism. Understand?"

It was a question, but more like a command.

He stopped shaking me and apologized.

"I've got a terrible pain up here." He rubbed his head.

"They keep me here."

"You don't want those kids to be bulletbait, do you?" I asked, hoping to convince him. "They have to be trained, and the better their training, the better our chances for victory and the better chance they have to live. We need experienced men to teach them how to--"

"Not me!" he shouted, glaring at me. "My job is there, out there", his long arms reaching for the West.

"Am I wrong", he asked, his voice getting soft and pleading, "Am I wrong?"

I couldn't answer him.

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